

Botswana clarifies stance on citrus fruit importation

In a recent announcement by Botswana's Minister of Agriculture, Fidelis Molao, the government has made its position regarding the importation of citrus fruits clear. Addressing the circulating rumors, Minister Molao stated that the government is not imposing an outright ban, but is instead implementing a temporary restriction on orange imports. This measure, which is in effect from June 17 to August 31, is designed to support the local agricultural sector and advance towards food self-sufficiency.

Local businesses are being encouraged to procure oranges from within the country, especially from the Tuli Block region, to meet national demand. This initiative is part of Botswana's wider strategy, which includes broader import restrictions on various fresh produce set to continue until 2025, aimed at fostering self-reliance.

The decision has, however, elicited concerns from neighboring South Africa, a significant exporter of citrus fruits to Botswana. South African stakeholders worry that these restrictions could affect their citrus exports, despite Botswana constituting a relatively small fraction of South Africa's overall citrus market.

Both countries are members of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), which allows for such restrictions under certain conditions. Yet, the frequent use of these measures is feared to potentially disrupt the principles of free trade within the union.

In the past, Botswana's import restrictions have led to price fluctuations but have also prompted an increase in local production. Minister Molao remains optimistic that local production will continue to grow, enabling Botswana to not only satisfy its internal demand but also to become a significant exporter of citrus fruits.

Since January 2022, Botswana has also enforced a ban on vegetable imports, which has been extended to December 2025. This move has significantly affected vegetable trade with South Africa, which previously accounted for about 80% of Botswana's fresh produce supply. Despite the concerns from South African farmers, the ban has resulted in a substantial decrease in Botswana's fresh-produce import bill and an increase in local horticultural production.

Minister Molao emphasized that these restrictions aim to protect and develop Botswana's burgeoning agricultural sector and are in compliance with SACU laws and international trade practices, including those of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which permits non-tariff barriers on agricultural products to safeguard domestic industries.

Source: TheVoice (<https://thevoicebw.com/botswanas-citrus-import-restriction-raises-concerns/>)

Publication date: Fri 30 Aug 2024

-

